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BY
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AND
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REVEALED RELIGION.

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I JOHN ii. 8.

Darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.

IT has been frequently asserted by Sceptics, that the world has derived no real advantage from the light of revealed Religion. Such an assertion is uncandid, ungrateful, criminal, and derogates so much from the honour of God, and his holy word, that an attempt shall be made in this discourse, not only to prove it utterly unfounded, but to shew, that man, in his temporal as well as spiritual capacity, is indebted to Revelation, for that essential knowledge, and for those blessings and benefits, on which his happiness here and hereafter chiefly depends. In proof of this proposition, the first argument I beg leave to submit to your attention is of a temporal nature; it is, that mankind are indebted to revealed Religion for the enjoyment of civil liberty in its present improved state. Whoever will take the trouble to examine the laws of Solon, or the digest of the Roman laws, will probably be much struck with their merit, and may be inclined to imagine them equal to the establishment of the civil liberty of mankind: Many of the

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laws of Solon were considered by the Romans as so excellent, that they were introduced into the Theodosian and Justinian codes; whence several of our laws are derived. But however excellent these laws were, they were insufficient to produce any permanent civil liberty either in the Grecian or Roman Empires; the only ancient states in which it can be pretended to have had any real existence. In fact, the single injunction of the Prophet Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God, comprehends more vital essence than all the laws of Solon or Justinian; and obedience to this short, but comprehensive, injunction, would be more productive of real civil liberty; for, notwithstanding the superior excellence of the laws or constitution of the state, civil liberty can never permanently exist under any government, unless the people are just and virtuous.

In support of this assertion, suffer me to quote the opinions of two eminent writers, the Roman Tacitus, and our Algernon Sidney; the former observing, that "a people without virtue may acquire liberty, but that "without virtue it can never be long maintained in "any community:" and the latter elegantly remarking, "that virtue is the dictate of reason, or a ray of divine "light, by which men are made beneficent and beneficial to each other. Religion, he observes, proceeds "from the same spring, and tends to the same end; and "the good of mankind so entirely depends on these two, "that

“ that no people ever enjoyed any thing worth desiring, “ that was not the product of them *.” The truth of the remarks of these writers is likewise proved by the histories of Greece and Rome. In Attica, during the period that the court of Areopagus † preserved its purity, and

* As a proof how much the welfare of the community depends on virtue and obedience to the laws, Polybius, in his 6th book, remarks, that whilst the laws of Lycurgus were observed, no commotions or seditions of the people were known in the city ; no change in the form of government was even proposed ; no private person usurped authority by violence, nor did any of the Kings ever attempt to assume more power than the laws allowed them to do. And Plato, in his 1st book de Leg., likewise remarks, that the hard and sober manner in which the Spartans were brought up, inspired them, during the rest of their lives, with a natural taste for frugality and temperance, insomuch that drunkenness, debauchery, and all their concomitant disorders, were banished from Sparta and its dependent territory.

† This court was the most sacred and venerable in Greece, and so very upright and impartial in its proceedings, that Demosthenes observes, that to his time there never had been so much as one of their determinations, of which either the plaintiff or defendant had any just reason to complain : it was composed of the first persons of the state, who had previously discharged the office of Archon : but their having discharged this highly honourable office was not sufficient for their election, till they had given in an account of their administration before the Logistæ, and obtained approbation, after an enquiry into their behaviour ; which enquiry was not a mere form, but was extremely severe, rigorous, and particular. The number of Senators that composed this court was not always the same ; but in an ancient inscription erected to the memory of Rufus Festus, it is declared to have consisted of three hundred members. Their power in the commonwealth was very great ; for, by Solon’s constitution, the

and its control over the religion and manners of the people, the Athenians were flourishing and virtuous, and so

inspection and custody of the laws was committed to them, and the public fund was disposed of and managed according to their discretion. All matters respecting blasphemy against the Gods, contempt of the holy mysteries, and all sorts of impiety, were especially referred to the judgment of this court, as well as the consecration of new Gods, erection of temples and altars, and every introduction of new ceremonies into divine worship. They seldom interfered in the management of public affairs, except in cases of great and imminent danger, when the commonwealth usually had recourse to them as the last and safest refuge. *Potter's Grecian Antiquities*, vol. i. page 101.

There is a remarkable account in Polybius of the extreme degeneracy of the Athenians of his time from the noble and respectable character just given them. In Greece (says the Historian) the man who is intrusted with the public money (without adverting to other matters), though it be but for a single talent, and though he has given a tenfold security in the most authentic form, and before twice that number of witnesses, cannot be brought to discharge his engagements; whilst, amongst the Romans, the mere religion of an oath keeps those who have vast sums of money which pass through their hands, either in the public administration or in foreign legations, from the least violation of their trust or honour. This degeneracy on the part of the Greeks, Polybius (who was himself a Greek) entirely ascribes to the little regard the Athenians paid to their Gods, and to their calling all piety superstition. He warns the Romans from following their wicked and impolitic example, attributing the splendor of the Roman Empire, and the success of its arms, to the great veneration at that time paid by the Romans to Religion, and to the fear of the Gods, predicting the decadence of the state whenever this fear should cease, and the obligations, which Religion alone can forcibly and effectually impose on civil life, should be slighted and contemned. *Vide Polyb. lib. vi. cap. 54.*

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remarkable for their justice, that the litigations of other states were frequently submitted to their award and decision. But when Aristides, from his passion for popularity, repealed those wise laws of Solon, which prohibited the lower classes of the people from holding any magisterial office; by which repeal, the basest persons obtained the first offices in the state; and especially, when, after him, Pericles (because he had never been elected an Archon, and therefore could not be a member of the Areopagite court) destroyed, by his political intrigues, the virtue, purity, and consequence of that court, and debauched the morals of the people, by an increase of those luxurious and expensive vices originally introduced by Persian gold and the effeminacy of Persian manners; from that period there never existed any true liberty in the Athenian state; ^{from that time} their history is little else than a record of their follies, vices, caprice, and injustice; all of which were exemplified in their wanton and unjust war with the people of Syracuse; which proved the immediate cause of the decline, and ultimately of the overthrow of their state. Thus when Athenian virtue fell, Athenian liberty fell with it.

It was precisely the same with the Romans; they were happy and enjoyed liberty in proportion to their virtue; for, did the limits of this discourse permit, it might be proved, from an induction of particulars, that they enjoyed more real liberty and happiness during the latter part of the reign of Augustus, and the reigns of those

those virtuous princes, Trajan and the Antonines, than they ever did under the republican form of government *. Whilst that form existed, the tyranny and oppression of the Patricians was so great, as first to cause the appointment of the Tribunes; and afterwards, those very Tribunes, instigated either by personal or party mo-

* Those who know how much the moral and religious character of a nation can be proved by history to depend on the private as well as public character of its Sovereign, will be of opinion, that the civil liberty and general happiness of the British Empire has been as much promoted by the example of piety and virtue which his Majesty, since his accession to the throne, has invariably given it, as by the excellence of its laws, or the freedom of its constitution. The truth of this proposition may be ascertained without searching other records than those of our own history, or other reigns than the usurped one of Oliver Cromwell, and that of Charles the Second; during which period the moral and religious character of the nation formed itself from that of the person on the throne, and was as different in the two reigns as in that of these men themselves. That example is beyond precept is an axiom as applicable to a nation as to an individual; and however good the laws of any state may be, its moral and religious character will ever depend upon, and be more influenced by, that of the reigning Monarch, than by any other cause whatever. Thus, when the Emperor Julian proposed to his army to apostatize from Christianity, excepting one single man (who on that account was put to death as a deserter), his whole army agreed to do the same. In fact, the example of the Sovereign is like the Sun, whose effulgent beams pervade every where; and the influence of his moral and religious character is so powerful as to penetrate and extend to (and, if it is a good one, to illuminate in the most beneficial manner) the remotest parts of his Empire.

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tives, under the popular pretext of maintaining the liberties of the people, were ever fomenting quarrels and divisions between the Patricians and Plebeians; so that harmony or peace never had any permanent existence in the state, and the most flagrant acts of injustice and tyranny were perpetrated on both sides *. In short, how

* It was by Cæsar's influence over the Tribunes, that, against the wish and will of the Senate, he was continued in the command of that army with which he ultimately overthrew the government of his country. When the Senate had decreed that Cicero should be recalled from banishment, on the evening previous to the day this decree was to be promulgated to the people, the tribune Clodius filled the forum with his mob; in consequence of which, another was brought by the friends of Cicero; a very bloody affray ensued, and many lives were lost. Plutarch, in his life of Cato, tells us, that elections were carried on, not only by notorious and avowed bribery, but by the respective mobs of the candidates, who committed every sort of outrage; insomuch that it was imagined, from the frequent and bloody engagements between the parties, that a civil war would ensue. The feuds and animosities, that prevailed amongst the Roman nobility during the latter part of the Republic, were such that they were usually in fear of assassination. Pompey mentioned his apprehension of this to the Senate; and even Cæsar shewed his fear of it, when, after dining with Cicero, and passing the seat of Dolabella, whom he had lately displeased, he ordered his soldiers to arrange themselves quite close to his carriage on each side; and this fear, much more than motives of pomp or state, induced the Roman nobility, when they went to their country seats, to be attended with armed followers, between whom frequent contests happened; amongst the rest, that between the followers of Milo and Clodius, in which the latter was slain. Thus there was as little personal security as civil liberty amongst them.

is it possible to conceive there could be any real liberty amongst a people, where the Tribunes (for the most part very turbulent seditious men) had the inordinate and unreasonable power of assembling the people when they pleased, and to propose to them what they pleased, to put an entire stop to the deliberations of the Senate when they pleased, and to prevent the passing its decrees by only pronouncing the word "Veto*;" amongst a people where the very fountain of justice was so abominably corrupt, that when a Censor was appointed, about seventeen years after the dictatorship of Sylla, no less than sixty-four Senators were expelled the Senate; the greatest part of them, it is expressly asserted, for the detestable practice of taking money for judging causes.

It may perhaps be imagined, that the power and se-

* The Augurs had the same power of stopping the proceedings of the Senate. These were generally Senators of consular rank, who had passed through all the dignities of the Republic. As a proof of their power, when the Senate one day was going to pass some decree which Pompey did not approve of (though in reality it did not pass it), he loudly exclaimed in the Senate, "It thunders;" availing himself thus of his power, as an Augur, to insist that not a word more should be said on the subject in debate, and to dissolve the meeting, which he immediately did.

Montesquieu, in his *Esprit des Loix*, reprobates this absurd and extravagant privilege of the Augurs and Tribunes, as inconsistent with liberty and good government: and so probably did Cato and those who were real patriots. The strong dictatorial arm of Sylla suppressed this tribunitial power entirely; but the political views and corruption of some, and the folly or knavery of others, soon restored it.

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ditional practices of the Tribunes, and the injustice of the Judges, were confined to the city of Rome: but in the provinces of the Roman Empire, there was still less liberty; for there, in fact, the liberty of the subject depended on the will of one magistrate, either Prætor or Proconsul; who, with a few officers of his own appointment, administered justice, or rather injustice; for the oppression of these men almost exceeds credibility. It is true, these governors were amenable to the censure of the Roman Senate; and numbers of them were complained against and arraigned there; but, either by bribery, or family interest, they generally escaped punishment*.

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* Cicero, in his oration against Verres, Prætor of Sicily, paints, at full length, the conduct of one of these men. He informs us there was not an estate in Sicily of any considerable value, which had been disposed of by will for twenty years past, in which Verres did not employ his emissaries to find out some flaw in the title, or some omission in executing the conditions of the testator, as a pretext for extorting money from the heir: and that there was not a magisterial office of any kind to be disposed of, which he did not arbitrarily sell to the best bidder. Of the conquered towns in Sicily a tenth only of the corn belonged to the Romans, and used to be sent to Rome; but Verres, by an infamous edict, ordered the occupiers of the land to deliver whatever quantity his collector might think proper to exact; and, if the unfortunate man demurred, he was not only plundered of his property, but his person was tortured till he complied. Thus oppressed, these occupiers of land deserted their houses, or neglected tilling their grounds; so that, from the registers which

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Another reason why true civil liberty never existed amongst either the Greeks or Romans, was, their having an almost inconceivable number of slaves in their cities. By a poll taken by the order of Demetrius, and mentioned in Athenæus, it appeared, that in Athens there were no less than four hundred thousand slaves, and only twenty one thousand citizens. These slaves were often treated in the most inhuman manner: and Thucydides writes, that whenever the Spartans thought their slaves were too numerous, they used to put them to death, without their having been guilty of the least crime; and that, by the advice of the Ephori, some young men killed in one night two thousand in this manner. In Rome, if a nobleman was found dead in his house, his numerous slaves were indiscriminately put to the torture; and, till

were punctually kept in every town, it appeared; that, during the government of this unjust man, above two thirds of the whole number of farmers on the island had either wholly deserted their farms, or left their lands uncultivated. There are nine charges more, which Cicero brings against this Prætor, as enormous, or more so, than those mentioned; and in his oration he expressly observes, that, though few of the governors of provinces came up to the full measure of Verres's iniquity, yet the greatest part of them were guilty, in some degree, of every kind of oppression, with which he was charged. From this relation, a proper contrast may be formed between Roman and English freedom, between the tyranny and injustice which so often stigmatized the conduct of a Roman magistrate, and the liberal and upright conduct, which, so generally, I may say so universally, adorns and distinguishes that of a British one.

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the Emperor Adrian prevented it, every Roman might, with impunity, kill his slaves. The very essence of true civil liberty consisting in the members of a community acting conformably to the pure principles of justice, mercy, and piety, it is incompatible with either cruelty, oppression, or injustice, vices which neither the Grecian or Roman Republics were ever free from; and those, who are acquainted with their histories, will readily, I presume, admit, that true civil liberty (such as exists in this kingdom at this day) never substantially or permanently existed in either of those states. The prevalence of it, in this and other countries where it does prevail, is owing to that Religion which so forcibly inculcates, to nations as well as to individuals, to do as we would be done unto, to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God; to that Religion which confounds and overthrows the absurd and ridiculous pretensions of all proud men (carried to such a blasphemous height towards God, and to such a preposterous one towards their fellow creatures by the Pagans), by telling all vain and arrogant mortals, that, their origin is from the dust; "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return;" that tells the greatest Monarch, that all he possesses, he has received from a superior Being; and that, independently of the pleasure and permission of that Being, he can plead no right or title, nor shew any reason, why he should be clothed in purple, and be seated on a throne, in preference to the wretch scarcely clothed at all,

who begs alms at his palace-gate; to that Religion, which tells the proud man, that the fleeting and transient distinction arising from his rank, wealth, or power, of which he is so vain, is of little or no true worth; and that the real permanent distinction between man and man, which is, or should be, the chief object of attention of every man of sense and reason, is placed, by the Almighty, in another and better world, and is the result, neither of wealth, rank, or power, but of a virtuous and pious life, and is equally attainable by all men, the peasant as well as the peer; that tells the tyrant, that God is no respecter of persons, and that the value of the life of the meanest slave is such in his estimation, that he will suffer no man, however high his rank or fortune may be, to deprive him wantonly of it, with impunity; “Who so sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made he man.” All this knowledge we derive from Revelation; for, before its promulgation, excepting a few Philosophers and a multitude of Tyrants, the whole world was darkened by the ignorance of essential knowledge, and fettered in slavery; and from this deplorable state it is indebted for its release to the invaluable doctrines of Revelation*.

* It is shocking to reflect on the barbarity of the Heathens in this particular, of what little value they considered the life of man, and upon what frivolous pretexts they deprived him of it.

The religion of Christ absolutely enjoins and requires, that honour should be shewn the King, and those in authority under him; it equally enjoins subordination in society, without which no community can subsist; but, at the same time that it thus peremptorily insists on the observance of that respect and subjection which are the very basis of peace, order, and welfare in society, it abhors that pride and arrogancy which has so direct a tendency to disturb and subvert that order. Thus the just and sublime doctrines of Revelation are peculiarly adapted to human life, and to the promotion of its welfare. For by affirming that all men have one common origin, and thus depressing the vain and haughty notions of the proud, and encouraging and elevating those of the humble, it exposes the false and insolent principles on which pagan distinction was built*; and equitably settles a rea-

* From the time that Alexander the Great had caused himself to be declared by the senior Priest, the son of Jupiter Ammon, in all his letters, orders, and decrees, he signed, Alexander, King, son of Jupiter Ammon; and, to his eternal disgrace, he put Calisthenes to death for not assenting to his being worshipped as a God.

The Emperor of China, who is said to reign over 333 millions of people, and whose territory is reputed to be one eleventh part of the globe, has the pride and temerity to enroll amongst his adulatory titles the incommunicable one of the Deity; and on his birth-day, his subjects are obliged to prostrate themselves before his throne nine times, and at each prostration to touch the ground nine times with their foreheads; and when they address him, they usually first fall on their knees before him. See *Sir G. Staunton's Account of the Embassy to China*.

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sonable distinction of rank in society on humane, liberal, and permanent principles. It infuses into the heart of man just ideas of his natural rights, such as are suitable to a being created in the image of God, however low his rank in the community may be; such as neither, on the one hand, suffer the Monarch to be proud and haughty, nor, on the other, require his subjects to be abject or servile; such as appreciate the dignity of human nature, and are extremely favourable to universal happiness, but which all ancient history concurs in proving, that neither jurisprudence or philosophy could effect; such, in short, as naturally engender genuine principles of civil liberty, and support it in action: a state of liberty this as much superior to what the Greeks and Romans ever enjoyed, as the religion of Jesus Christ is superior to pagan Idolatry. How then can the Sceptic with any justice, or shew of reason, affirm, that the world has derived no real advantage from the light of revealed Religion?

With respect to the spiritual advantages we derive from Revelation, though they are of a more obvious nature than those just mentioned, they are too important, and are too intimately connected with the argument I have undertaken, not to be enumerated in this discourse. These advantages consist, not only in the information of our origin, probationary state, and destiny, intelligence of the utmost moment and importance to our comfort here, and our everlasting happiness hereafter; but we are likewise

likewise informed of the nature of the Deity and of his glorious attributes, and especially that of his goodness to the human race, so peculiarly and particularly described in the Bible. In that inestimable book we are told of our being created after the image of God, of the concern and interest God is pleased to take in human affairs, and the great encouragement he every where offers to our obedience, promising his grace and favour as an infallible consequence of it, and that, for the obedience of Abraham, all nations of the earth should be blessed. From the Gospel we learn, that, on our sincere repentance and amendment of life, God has promised, that he will be pleased (through Christ's merits) to pardon our sins. We thereby obtain the invaluable knowledge of our immortality, and of that blessed hope of everlasting life, the expectation of which is so great a cause of consolation and happiness to us at present, and is pregnant with such sublime ideas of future felicity. We are likewise informed of the manner in which it has pleased God to prescribe our worship of him, and of the measure of duty he requires us to perform. Of all this important knowledge the Pagan was destitute, and, from his ignorance of his personal and particular obligations to God in all these spiritual points, the love of God never did nor could exist in his mind, or, if at all, but in a very slight degree, as an effect cannot exist without a cause; and the chief reason or cause of man's love to God, is the consciousness of his personal obligations to him in a spiritual sense, which he can only learn from the Scriptures.

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But the advantages derived by the human race from this superior intelligence, are not circumscribed or limited to the mere knowledge of them. Happily for man, this heavenly information is of a nature so convincing, so penetrating, so powerful, as to be capable of influencing his heart and conduct, and to give a new and superior turn to his thoughts and ideas with respect to true happiness and glory; acquainting him with the proper objects for his pursuit in this life, as the sure and unerring means to produce that glorious end, everlasting felicity, in the next.

Thus revealed Religion has exceedingly dignified the nature of man, by so essentially improving his heart and enlightening his mind: the present ideas of mankind, with respect to religious worship, wherever the doctrines of the Gospel have been truly promulgated, prove this incontestably; and that the very lowest and least educated men have acquired very superior information from revealed Religion. For could the most illiterate Christian forbear to remark the folly, as well as impiety, of a set of men falling down and worshipping a Bull, or a Crocodile, as a God? which, from being deprived of our spiritual knowledge, the Egyptians did. Is there a Christian, however ill informed, who would not be shocked to see a mortal like himself assuming divine honours, ordering a temple to be erected to him, in which was an image of gold representing the Emperor, habited in imperial robes, like those he wore, and before which a set of priests every day fell down and worshipped,

shipped, and offered to it the most costly sacrifices? This the Roman Emperor Caligula did *. And Philip, the father of Alexander, if possible exceeded him in impiety; for in a publick procession made in honour of his daughter's marriage, he directed statues of the twelve major Gods to be made, and, at the same time, one for himself, more exquisitely carved and adorned than the rest, which he ordered to be carried in the procession by itself, and before them all. But, as if this impious audacity merited immediate punishment, he was himself stabbed and slain by one of his officers † in this very procession. In these, and a variety of similar instances which might be enumerated, did the Pagans insult the Deity; and still more so, by the impious worship of several of their Gods and Goddesses, in ceremonies so very shocking and impure, that it is almost incredible mankind, and especially civilized men, could have been so utterly depraved, as to have ever introduced or suffered

* The extravagancies of this man are too many and too great to be here enumerated: he took off the heads of the ancient statues of the Gods, and put his own in their place, and used to stand between the statues of Castor and Pollux, to be adored. He ordered Petronius, governor of Syria, to have a statue made of him, representing him as the image of Jupiter; and he affected not only to be adored as the new Jupiter, but to have all the Gods and Goddesses worshipped in his person; for which purpose he sometimes carried a trident, as Neptune; at others a caduceus, like Mercury; a harp, like Apollo; or a pike, like Mars. *Vide Sueton. in vita Caligulae.*

† Pausanias.

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them as part of religious worship; and it is to be lamented, for the honour of human nature, that the detail of these obscene ceremonies has ever been transmitted to posterity.

Now, if it is granted, that the least informed Christian could by no means be induced to practise, in his religious worship, any of the abominable idolatries of the Pagans, and that he can give a more rational and sublime account of the nature of the Deity and his attributes, and of his own origin and destiny, than the wisest and best informed heathen Philosopher, to what cause can his superior knowledge be ascribed? It cannot be to Philosophy, for this illiterate Christian never trod the academic grove. Is it to natural Religion? Neither that nor Philosophy ever did or could inculcate the sublime truths before mentioned even to the Grecian Sages, who, as St. Paul tells them, professing themselves wise, they became fools; and, as he writes to the Corinthians, God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty*. The superior knowledge of the literate then as to Theology, and all the knowledge of the illiterate

* There is a reflection as justly made, as it is well expressed, by Dr. Middleton, in his life of Cicero, which is so very applicable to the subject in question, that, I flatter myself, I shall be excused in quoting it. After an examination of the religion of Cicero, he remarks as follows: "From this general view of Cicero's religion, one cannot help observing, that the most exalted state of human reason is so

illiterate with respect to it, must be derived from revealed Religion: this heavenly intelligence could originate from no other source; no other adequate cause can be assigned for it; and therefore, since so large a part of the human species, since both the learned and unlearned have had their minds so greatly illuminated by it, the Sceptic cannot possibly affirm with truth, that the world has derived no real advantage from revealed Religion.

Having endeavoured to prove how much Revelation has augmented the happiness of man by increasing his spiritual knowledge, and by having been the chief and

so far from superseding the use, that it demonstrates the benefit of a *more explicit Revelation*; for though *the natural law*, in the perfection to which it was carried by Cicero, might serve for a guide to the few such as himself of enlarged minds and happy dispositions, yet it had been so long depraved and adulterated by the prevailing errors and vices of mankind, that it was not discoverable even to those few, without great pains and study; and could not produce in them, at last, any thing more than an hope, never a full persuasion; whilst the greatest part of mankind, even of the virtuous and inquisitive, lived *without the knowledge of a God, or the expectation of a futurity*, and the multitude in every country was left to the gross idolatry of the popular worship. When we reflect on all this, we must needs see abundant reason to be thankful to God for the *divine light of his Gospel, which has revealed at last to babes what was bidden from the wise*; and, without the pains of searching, or danger of mistaking, has given us not only the hope, but the assurance of happiness, and made us not only the believers, but *the heirs of immortality*.

essential cause of establishing true civil liberty in society; I shall now attempt to prove that the most useful learning which prevails at present in the world, may be justly ascribed to the same cause. From their great reverence for those important records, the Jews were induced to preserve the Scriptures with the greatest care: but the Christians, whose veneration for these invaluable writings equalled, at least, that of the Jews, have contributed much more than they, both to secure, and to explain them. The Christians collected and preserved the Greek versions of the Scriptures, particularly that of the Septuagint, and they translated the originals into Latin; they likewise preserved the works of Josephus, which so much illustrate the Jewish history.

To Christians is to be ascribed the publication of the old Hexapla, and, in later times, that of the Polyglotts, and the Samaritan Pentateuch. It was the deep and accurate investigation of the Scriptures which excited Christians to the study of chronology, which requires much knowledge of history, and some of astronomy. The New Testament being written in Greek, it occasioned Christians to apply themselves to the study of that language. At first indeed Christianity was assailed and opposed both by Jews and Heathens; and this persecution lasted for a considerable period; but it was compensated by many advantages; for it was that very opposition, which induced the Christians to justify and defend their cause; to confute their adversaries, the Jewish doctors and
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learned Heathens; to expose the absurdity of Jewish traditions, the weakness of Paganism, and the imperfection and insufficiency of Heathen Philosophy. To accomplish this, both Jewish and Pagan literature and classical erudition was necessary; from the study of which Christians became equal, if not superior, in learning to the Heathens. Mosheim observes, though, till the third century, the Fathers were generally Greek writers, yet, in this century, when Latin was much on the decline, the Christians were the chief cause of preventing it from sinking into absolute barbarism; and he observes, that, from the fourth to the sixth century, many very learned Christians flourished*: after the sixth century, indeed, till the Reformation, Europe was more distinguished by ignorance, superstition, and the ecclesiastical tyranny of Rome, than by its learning: however, in those dark ages, there were not only pious and charitable, but studious men. Even in those unenlightened times, there were always schools in the cathedrals and monasteries, by which means some literature was kept up in different nations, and at different times; first at Rome, then in England, and afterwards in France and Germany; and this mode of education and instruction continued till

* In the fourth and fifth centuries, Lactantius, Jerom, and Sulpitius Severus flourished; in the sixth, Boethius, and, amongst the Fathers, Justin Martyr, Clemens of Alexandria, Basil, Athanasius, Gregory, Chrysostom, Origen, and Eusebius, the father of ecclesiastical history.

the foundation of universities, those seminaries, where, in this country at least, pure Theology and every species of essential science is taught, and where (unlike the schools of the old Greek Philosophers) that Theology and science is recommended and adorned by the exemplary lives and manners of its professors *. To the establishment then of monasteries first, and afterwards of universities, it is owing that we are in possession of the Greek and Latin classics, as they would probably have utterly perished, had they not, in the first instance, been transcribed and deposited by the Monks in their libraries. Therefore to Christianity we are chiefly indebted for the preservation of ancient literature. For if the religion of Jesus Christ had never prevailed, most likely the Latin and Greek languages would have become extinct, from the revolution of empires, and from the irruptions of Barbarians in the East and West; as the old inhabitants would not, like the Jews, have been influenced by any conscientious or religious motives to have preserved their language. Then, together with the Greek and Latin tongues, the knowledge of antiquities and of the ancient writers would have been destroyed. The probability of this idea is very much supported by the present state of Africa, where the Latin language is absolutely un-

* Aristotle and Cicero both affirm, that the lives of the major part of the old Philosophers utterly disgraced the morality and philosophy which they inculcated and taught in their schools. *Vide Arist. Ethic. lib. ii. cap. 3. & Ciceronis Tusculan. Quæst. lib. ii.*

known,

known, though, in the fifth century, it was spoken there as in Italy *. To revealed Religion may likewise be attributed that portion of learning which the lower classes of people in Europe possess; because a desire that they should be able to peruse the Scriptures, may reasonably be supposed to have been the first and chief inducement with their parents to have them taught to read; and the same pious motive was probably the original cause of the establishment of charity-schools, where some of them laid the foundation of that literature, for which afterwards they became eminently distinguished. To the Gospel then, directly or indirectly, and to those who embraced it, are due our grateful acknowledgments for the learning that now prevails in the world: and Sceptics, though they pretend to say no real advantage has been derived from revealed Religion, are nevertheless indebted to it for that very learning which they ungenerously employ to undermine, and with which they endeavour to depreciate and overthrow its evidence †.

If it suited a discourse of this kind, many reasons might be adduced to prove, that the fine arts are much

* Vide Jortin and Mosheim, to whose writings I am greatly indebted in this branch of my discourse.

† These men prove the truth of an observation of Mr. Locke's, that, when the mind is not in itself just and right, ignorance is preferable to erudition, as erudition only enables such a mind to disseminate more speciously and extensively its mischievous errors and pernicious opinions; a remark applicable to Sceptics in general, and to those of France in particular.

indebted

indebted for their present state of perfection to revealed Religion. It is the opinion at least of some writers of taste and erudition, that the magnificence, the exquisite art, grace, and beauty of Solomon's Temple *, was the original cause of that grand style in architecture which first prevailed in Greece, and afterwards in Rome. But I have already trespassed so much on your time, that I must forbear adducing a variety of arguments, that might otherwise be enumerated in favour of revealed Religion.

* Josephus writes, that the Temple of Solomon was, upon the whole, so fine, so superb an edifice, and so exquisite in its architecture, as to look rather as if it was the produce of providence or nature, than of human art. Now, if his description of this Temple is attended to, and the drawings made from it are carefully examined, especially those of the golden Altar of Incense, the brazen Sea, the Ark of the Covenant, with the Cherubims, the brazen Bases and Laver, the golden Table of Shew Bread, the Base of the golden Candlestick, and the brazen Altar of burnt Sacrifices, there will be discerned and felt, from such an examination, that enchanting and fascinating effect, which is produced by a view of the genuine antique; and therefore it is extremely probable, that this Temple was the origin of that inimitable grace and elegance so remarkable in those temples and public edifices, afterwards erected by the Greeks and Romans. *Vide Joseph. Antiq. lib. viii. cap. 42.*

It is certain that, indirectly at least, the fine arts have been encouraged and promoted by the effects of revealed Religion. Thus, in poetry, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and Tasso's *Gierusalemme Liberata*, may be instanced. In architecture, the noble edifices of St. Paul's in England, and St. Peter's at Rome. In painting, Raphael's *Cartoons* and *Holy Family*, Rubens's *Descent from the Cross*, Correggio's *Notte*, &c. &c. And in Music, the sacred *Oratorios* of Handel, Marcello's *Psalms*, and the *Stabat Mater* of Pergolese.

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One of these, however, is of too much importance to be omitted, namely, that the world is indebted to it for that blessed philanthropy and charity, which so particularly adorns this nation, and which may, with so much advantage to Britons, be contrasted with the merciless conduct of the Romans, in exposing their children to perish when young*, and their servants when old, in their cruel gladiatorial shews, and their bloody proscriptions by Marius and Sylla under the commonwealth, and afterwards by the Emperors Caligula, Nero, Caracalla, and many others.

To conclude: With respect to the Philosophy and Religion of the Heathens, it may be asserted, that the morality of the Stoics was savage and impracticable, the manners and opinions of the Epicureans, atheistical, sensual, and lascivious; that their liberty was licentious and without justice, their religion senseless, impious, and without purity; and that, till the blessed doctrines of Revelation enlightened the mind and corrected the will and heart of man, properly speaking, neither national mercy, true civil liberty, nor any other than an idola-

* The Roman nobility used sometimes, when their servants were old and past their labour, to have them carried to an island on the Tiber, for the express purpose of their being starved to death; and the Roman women frequently exposed their children in the highways, to die by hunger and the inclemency of the weather. The Emperor Trajan tried all in his power to prevent this inhumanity, but in vain; it was not finally put a stop to, till the reign of the Christian Emperor Constantine.

trous religion, existed in the world. This is by no means an opinion or sentiment hazarded ; it is formed, from a conviction engendered by an attentive perusal of ancient history, with a view to ascertain its truth, and likewise with a view to discover whether in any age a great nation ever enjoyed the same political happiness and civil liberty, as every man does or may enjoy under the British Empire, and which, as far as a conclusion of this nature may be drawn from history, there is no reason to suppose any former nation ever did *. Now since there

* Amongst the moderns, the people of Switzerland, and amongst the ancients, the original Greeks, in their little republics (before they were incorporated into the greater states of Attica and Sparta), seem to have made the nearest approaches, though always far from attaining to our perfection of civil liberty. The Athenians likewise enjoyed a considerable degree of liberty, from the period that intervened between the expulsion of Hippias and the invasion of Xerxes, and for a short time after : but, it is to be observed, that the relative civil liberty enjoyed by these states was chiefly owing to their poverty, and their being in very small communities, Attica not having been so large as some of our counties. Now though it may be easy to communicate civil liberty to a small state, nothing in the world is more difficult than to impart and preserve it in a great one ; inasmuch that no other great state, except England, ever permanently enjoyed it ; and it is the strongest proof possible of the singular and peculiar virtue of the English constitution and people, that, whilst every other great nation has lost its liberty by its affluence and prosperity, the British nation, amidst the splendor of royalty, a large standing army and navy, a commerce superior to what the world ever beheld, an immense national income, great possessions, and estates of the nobility and gentry, and a proportionable luxury, enjoys more real civil liberty than any other state, either great or small, does,

there is nothing which so much advances the temporal and eternal happiness of the human species, as the knowledge of the nature of God, and of his glorious attributes, and particularly of his goodness to the human race, as the knowledge of true Theology, and of the pure principles of civil liberty, as literature, as good will towards mankind; each of which is either wholly derived from revealed Religion, or has been preserved to mankind by it; how essentially is man indebted, both in his temporal and spiritual capacity, to that divine religion, which, as Lord Bacon observes, so much more than any other, abates the selfish and promotes and encourages the social affections of man. But, if an enumeration of the blessings derived from revelation does not convince the Sceptic that real advantage has accrued to the world from the light of revealed Religion, let

does, or ever has done; and every man in the nation ought to venerate from his heart its present constitution for the noble fruit it produces, namely, that of constituting the law paramount, and causing it to be administered faithfully, impartially, and indiscriminately, to all ranks and degrees of the people; for reprobating every species of persecution, for tolerating all religious worship, for considering every man's house as his castle, and equally securing from invasion his life and property. Whilst these fruits flourish, every real lover of his country will be always anxious to preserve, as much as possible, in its present state, so noble a tree, the real tree of liberty; and when he consents to its being pruned (as at times it will require), he will wish that every shoot be distinctly marked and examined, before it is touched; that, neither the parent stock, nor any material branch, may be, in the least, injured by the operation.

him turn to the miseries with which it is, and has been, overwhelmed by the neglect of its doctrines. Let him mark the sad life and sadder death of those who disobey its injunctions; let him go into the courts of law, into real life, into the cabinets of princes; and he will see, that all the law-suits, the divorces, the duels, and the wars, which have destroyed the peace of families and individuals, made orphans and widows, depopulated and impoverished nations, have been caused by the inobservance, the infringement, the violation of the doctrines of the Gospel, by that wickedness, uncharitableness, pride, obstinacy, and perverseness, inherent in man, and which the religion of Jesus Christ was intended to rebuke and to correct. In fact, those Sceptics who are acquainted with human nature either from history, or from having been engaged in active scenes of life, and who know how very wicked the heart of man naturally is *, should be the first to confess that a remedy, greater than Philosophy ever supplied, was wanting to cure so inveterate a disease; and, if candid, must own, that, in the doctrines of the Gospel that remedy is to be found: consequently he ought to acknowledge and revere its authority, and allow that the world has derived consummate advantage from the light of revealed Religion; for, in truth, by the important information imparted by the Gospel, and by the sublime and heavenly principles it contains, human

* Jeremiah xvii. 9. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

nature is as much improved, and appears under a Christian character as much superior in excellence to what it did under an heathen one, as the science of astronomy does under the system of Sir Isaac Newton, to what it did under that of Descartes or Tycho Brahe.

In Sermons of this kind, it may not be unusual to enlarge on the duties of the ministerial function ; but, independently of thinking this to be more immediately the province of our worthy and learned Diocesan, and his venerable representative, as many Clergymen present have more experience and more erudition than myself, I beg to be excused any further discussion on this head, than to beseech, that our humble and united prayers may be offered to Almighty God, to give us grace to set the example of a virtuous and religious life in our respective parishes ; and that we may consider ourselves as the guardians of the temporal as well as spiritual welfare of our parishioners, and, by a marked attention to the former, prove that we have sincerely at heart the promotion of the latter.

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